UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/2083
16 February 1996

F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

* Secretary-General for Habitat II says new partnerships between Governments, private sector and non-governmental organizations help shape Conference's agenda.

* Nearly one-fourth of UNITA's troops and large part of Angolan Government's rapid reaction police register at quartering sites.

* UNHCR's humanitarian activities for refugees in Great Lakes Region of Africa threatened by severe funding shortfall.

* Protection of atmosphere precondition for sustainable economic development, experts tell Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy.

* Television series "UN in Action" rated highly by viewers and broadcasters, according to DPI survey.

* WHO announces influenza vaccine formula for 1996-97.

* * *

The real issue before the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) was how to provide healthy, sustainable living spaces for a growing human population in a finite world, according to its Secretary-General, Wally N' Dow. The Conference will be held in Istanbul, Turkey in June. Mr. N'Dow told correspondents today that new partnerships based on the willingness of national governments to work with local authorities, non-governmental organizations and the private sector had played an important role in preparing Habitat II's agenda. Those partnerships would continue to have strong voices in the process leading to Istanbul. They would also set an important precedent for future United Nations humanitarian activities.

Since the first Habitat Conference 20 years ago, the classical idea that Governments were the "be all and end all" had changed, he continued. Governments could no longer afford to act alone. The private sector's role in building and maintaining cities was universally accepted and non-governmental organizations had gained tremendous advocacy and power. People in communities

(more)

For information media—not an official record

and neighbourhoods must be encouraged to act and participate in their own welfare. There had been intense debate during the preparatory sessions on the concept of the right to housing, which was increasingly seen as a way to improve people's welfare. It was an issue which would be taken up again in Istanbul and beyond, he added.

* * *

In Angola, 14,102 troops from the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) have been disarmed and registered at four quartering sites, according to a United Nations spokesman. She said 1,079 soldiers had reported without weapons and those handed in were mainly small arms. Although the quartering of a fourth of UNITA's force in the last two weeks was very encouraging, its declared strength numbered 62,500 troops, she added.

Four additional quartering sites will be operational in the next few days and would hold about 20,000 troops, the spokesman said. A large part of the Government's rapid reaction police had been quartered at three sites. However, troops still had to be quartered in seven or eight cities. Meanwhile, the Government and UNITA were negotiating in Luanda on remaining issues including the formation of a national army.

* * *

The United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) might have to drastically reduce its humanitarian programmes for refugees in the Great Lakes Region of Africa because of a serious shortfall in funding. A United Nations spokesman said today the Agency had received $26 million from the European Commission's Humanitarian Office and $1 million from Norway to fund programmes which would cost an estimated $288 million this year. Already, money had been borrowed from the UNHCR's emergency fund, its general fund for voluntary repatriation and other programmes.

The UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme for Rwanda might be severely set back, affecting its ability to cope in the event of a large scale return of refugees, the spokesman said. There could also be cutbacks in the delivery of water, sanitation and health services and the Agency might not be able to go ahead with plans to build 30,000 shelters for returnees. Activities in family unification and trauma treatment might have to be curtailed.

* * *

Protection of the atmosphere was a precondition for ensuring sustainable economic development, the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development was told yesterday. An official from the United

Nations Energy and Natural Resources Branch presented a paper which examines the relationship between energy and development, worldwide trends in energy usage and strategies for mitigating and avoiding the adverse impact of possible climate change.

According to the paper, environmental protection faces competing social and political concerns such as the eradication of poverty and the provision of health care and employment opportunities. One expert said developing countries faced difficult choices between their energy requirements and the negative impact of power plants. Another said carbon outputs had been relatively stable due to slowing production in Eastern Europe but were likely to increase as developing economies expanded and economies in transition increased their levels of production.

* * *

The United Nations television series "UN in Action", which is aired weekly on more than 100 stations around the world, has been rated as excellent or very good by viewers and broadcasters, according to a recent survey by the Department of Public Information (DPI). The three-minute video news items show how the UN handles and copes with such issues as humanitarian affairs, the environment, social or economic development, refugees and peace-keeping. The series is also broadcast weekly on CNN World Report which is seen by two million people in the United States and by a much larger number in more than 140 countries that receive CNN International.

The DPI survey, which evaluated the reach and impact of the series, found that 76 per cent of viewers indicated the series contributed significantly to their knowledge and understanding of the United Nations work. Over 46 per cent of stations broadcast the series on their prime-time newscast and another 25 per cent aired it during other newscasts. Some 70 per cent of broadcasters indicated they would air more episodes if produced and 50 per cent said they would be interested in a monthly half-hour magazine programme.

* * *

The World Health Organization (WHO) has announced a new influenza composition for the 1996-97 season. Every February, experts advise national health authorities and pharmaceutical companies on the composition of virus strains that should be used to produce vaccines for the next influenza season.

The WHO strongly advises the use of the vaccine as a preventive measure against the potentially fatal disease, particularly by the elderly, people with immunodeficiency, chronic heart or lung diseases and diabetes.

* *** *